

# “MAORI PLACE NAMES”

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*Abstract.* George Graham's writings on Maori Place Names are presented.

This paper is derived from a manuscript written by George Graham for presentation at a meeting of the Anthropology and Maori Studies Section (Auckland Institute and Museum) in 1926. A different version was published in "The Eden Gazette" newspaper (Auckland) later the same year. These have been edited into a single version which is presented here.

George Graham collected traditional information relating to Auckland and the other areas with which he was connected. His other manuscript material is being prepared for publication.

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## MAORI PLACE NAMES by George Graham

The student of the history of any country from time to time in his researches, comes across the fact that its nomenclature often requires to be studied in order to correctly understand the circumstances surrounding any particular historical event.

So far, very little has been done in a systematic manner to put Maori nomenclature on record. Several valuable essays on the subject have been given before the N.Z. Institute, and throughout the mass of New Zealand Literature there is much that can be gleaned by the student. However, it would be a long and laborious process to effect anything approaching completeness.

I propose to deal only with some outstanding features of Maori nomenclature, giving examples of place names under the several classifications which they may be arranged. Such a classification of place names I would suggest for the purpose should be as follows:-

*First* — Names descriptive of the locality.

*Secondly* — Names commemorative of some event which happened in the place so named.

*Thirdly* — Names commemorative of places in the Maori home-land or of important personages.

In giving some examples of each of these various classes of place names I propose to confine the selection particularly to those in local use.

Taking the first class of names, those descriptive of localities; we find such are always remarkably appropriate; and this fact added to the natural beauty of the Maori language makes such names very commendable to European use. Of such names in common use I will select a few examples:

PUKEKOHE The hill of the Kohe tree.

MANGAWHAU The Whau Mountain. The whau is a shrub or small tree still found in the neighbourhood.

WAIWERA Hot water, where is the famous hot mineral spring.

WAIKOWHAI The name of the now favourite Park area on the shores of the Manukau, it means the "waters of the Kowhai tree".

WAIKATO is so called because of its well-known characteristic of having, no doubt within the Maori period, several times altered its course: hence its name — "the nibbling water" — they cut and nibble away the banks so as to change ultimately the river's course.

At one time the Waikato is said to have run out across the Piako Plains to the Hauraki Gulf; later, to have run via Waiuku into the Manukau, and after that again to have its present course to the sea. I leave it to the geologist to decide as to the correctness of this.

KAIPARA is the food of the para, a kind of fern with a tuberous root, formerly a favourite food of the Maori, and for which the district was famous.

HAURAKI is really the name of the site of the present Thames township and means the North West wind.

RANGITOTO means "sky-blood". This certainly does not imply that the Maori witnessed the volcanic energies of this mountain. Though recent *geologically*, its activities probably took place at a time long prior to Maori occupation of N.Z. This name in fact is that given to the particular kind of black lava rock, which is the feature of the Island. There is an interesting tradition, however, in respect of Rangitoto. It is to the effect that a volcanic mountain stood at the site of Lake Takapuna, this mountain gradually subsided and Rangitoto simultaneously rose from the sea. This is quite feasible; such convulsions have occurred in other places within historic times. I am sure, however, that this is only a tradition to be attributed to the fact that the Maori is a keen and intelligent observer of Nature in her many moods.

PUPUKE-MOANA is the actual name of Lake Takapuna.

Pupuke — 'to ooze' or be pushed out —  
'to leak' or flow over,

Moana — a sea or large lake.

This name was given because it was observed by the Maori that along the outer sea-shore, as well as at several places on the Waitemata side, there are a series of fresh-water springs which are undoubtedly the underground outflow from the lake. This Lake got its present name of Lake Takapuna in European times. Takapuna itself was a certain spring of water on the Western slope of the North Head, it probably means "spring water falling" (as in a cascade). When the Tainui canoe visited the Waitemata after her long voyage from Hawaiki her crew landed on the beach thereabouts, and ascended the North Head hill. They then named the Spring; (still, I understand, flowing there) after one of that name in their homeland.

HAUKAPUA was the name given to Torpedo Bay. It means the "Wind-scoop" that is it caught the boisterous Easterly sea winds, and gave shelter to the inner Harbour waters.

WAIPARUROA (long muddy creek) and 'Wai Paru-iti' (Short muddy creek are respectively the appropriate names of "Big" and "Little" Muddy Creek on the Manukau.

TE KAPUA (The Basin, or trough) is the fit name of "the Basin" at Onehunga. It is an old crater rim, of which there are several other examples about Auckland, of which I will mention two.

NGAKAPUARUA "the two basins" are similar formations at the head of Shoal Bay. Each has its own particular name and tradition. Here, traditions says an unfortunate giant (tipua) and his wife quarreled in former times, because they felt cold. Mr Tipua blamed Mrs Tipua, because she had not woven his garments properly. Mrs Tipua blamed her husband because of the quality of the flax he had gathered. Between the two they cursed Mahuika; she was the goddess of subterranean fires. This lady divinity stopped the unseemly affair by drawing them both down into her fiery regions, where no doubt since those far off days they have had ample time to reflect on the consequences of cursing holy people. These crater basins represent the site of the disappearance of that unfortunate couple.

This is, of course, a localised story of very ancient origin, and is similar to many name places names and myths the wide-world over. Like all mankind, Polynesian man thereby desired to account for topographical features of a remarkable character.

TE TOKAROA is another such example. This is the name of the long reef off Point Chevalier.

Like many of these formations of Nature it is an old lava flow. The Maori, however, invested its origin with an appropriate tradition as follows:

A fairy people of ancient times were at inter-tribal war with one another. The weaker party, desiring to get away from strife, and impending defeat, decided to cross the Harbour. Therefore they started to build this rocky causeway. The sun arose on their unfinished labours. Like all true fairies they could no longer work. Worse than that, instead of at once seeking the gloomy seclusion of their native forests at Waitakerei, they were by the incantations of their enemies not able to see the coming dawn, until it suddenly broke and dried them all up. Their bones are said to be still found there; being in fact certain remains of treelimbs etc., covered by this old time convulsion of nature. Thus again the producing of a class of myth found all over the world.

ONEHUNGA means the “friable” or “pulverous soil” — a very correct name.

There are several names as we might imagine in N.Z. as well as in the Islands. However, this name is correctly *Oneunga* — meaning the landing or going ashore (*Unga*) beach or sand (*One*) — There the canoes were drawn up — where even into the 40's, there existed a large settlement — a kind of port for the large fleet of canoes that once plied the Manukau Harbour.

WAI-TE-MATA means the “Flint stone waters”.

Te Mata is “The flint stone” — is a pinnacle rock mid stream up harbour. It was formerly a tribal fishing boundary; as also a place whereon offerings were made by the fishers of their first catches, so as to propitiate the local deities, hence the name of the Harbour: “Wai-te-mata”. It does *not* mean as is usually stated the “sparkling” or “flashing waters”.

There are some names called after ancient chieftains which might be referred to: The Bay at Orakei where the Native Villages is located is “OKAHU” i.e. of Kahu or Kahu's place. This Kahu was Kahu-mata-mamoe, an Arawa chieftain, who for a time lived here and later went to Kaipara with his clan. Hence it is the Kaipara people remember their Arawa lineage.

OTAHUHU Likewise was called after Tahuhu, a chief who arrived in N.Z. in early times.

Leaving his first settlement at Te Arai (South of Whangarei), he came hither and lived. His descendants were the Ngai-Tahuhu, who ultimately intermarried and were absorbed by the local people. This name also is usually given another meaning i.e. “the Ridge-pole”, because like the ridge of a house the Otahuhu Isthmus divides the watersheds — on the one side is the Manukau and on the other is the Otaiki or Tamaki River.

I will now pass on to the second class of Place Names i.e. those given in commemoration of some event which there took place. These names in all countries are the most numerous — and the circumstances of the event having been often forgotten as time goes on this leads in many cases to the origin of the name being also forgotten.

So it is with very many Maori names: they are quite intelligible as to their meaning, but *how* or *why* they are so called is often not now known. If the name becomes mutilated in spelling, the difficulty is also increased of ascertaining the origin of the name.

For example — “*Te Muka*” in the South Island seems a correct place name, it means “Flax Fibre”; but, as a matter of fact it should be “*Te Uma-Ka*”, i.e. “The burning oven”, a tribal conflict had taken place there and the ovens were already merrily burning — in preparation to receive the unfortunate victims of the consequential cannibal feast. The victors were however surprised and attacked at this stage by an enemy reinforcement; and being defeated were many of them consigned without further ceremony to their own “burning ovens”. Hence the name of that place *Te Umu-ka*.

REMUERA is a name which will interest us all, as being one in everyday use, and no doubt it has survived because of its euphony. Now its meaning and history is more tragic than poetic. In olden days a party of Hauraki chiefs were visiting the Tamaki Isthmus people. On their way back to rejoin their canoes on the Tamaki River, they were waylaid

by some of the local people. Among the slain was a young chieftainess of high rank Hinerau whose body was consigned to the cannibal oven.

Her Remu (or skirt) was scorched in the process, and the incident gave its name to this affair and the place where it happened, which was somewhere near the Dilworth Institute. This name became the name of the locality and was mis-spelled at an early era by our pioneers. It should be Remu (skirt), wera (burnt). Now many of the lady's companions escaped death then, only to be eventually captured and killed with the exception of a few survivors at St. John's College. Hence the name of that now holy and peaceful spot, "Patu-tahi" together, or at one time.

TAMAKI is a name now confined as a named place to the districts on either bank of the Wai-o-Taiki tidal river also called the Tamaki. It is however correctly the name of the Isthmus as a whole. Te Tamaki-makau-rau to give it its full name, and means *Tamaki* — (a thing which is the object of interminable contest or strife,) *makau* is a young person sought after as a spouse, *rau* a hundred or numerous. Hence the name of this appropriately named and much contested tribal area, the scene of centuries of tribal conflict for its possession:- Hence "The land contested for by hundreds".

MAUINAINA means "caught basking in the sun". It is the name of a ridge pa at Panmure, on the Tamaki shores. Here in olden times the people were surprised by an invading enemy under the chief Kapetawa, under the circumstances mentioned.

MAUNGAREI was the "watchful, alert mountain", the people in that pa were not on that same occasion "caught napping". They were much awake and alert, (rei) to the position, and the attack on them was repulsed. This is the name of Mt. Wellington.

There are again some place names which preserve the memory of certain customs now passed away with the times wherein they were observed. I will give a few examples of such.

When a chief wished to take possession of a place for the benefit of his people, he would go there and comb his hair. Hence we have on the Tamaki River a place called "Te Pupu-a-Kawau"; here a Ngati-Whatua chieftain of old named Kawau combed his hair, and left the combings in a small bundle on a pole. He thereby made the locality quite tapu to himself.

TE IHUAMATAAHO near Mangere is a type of name given probably to secure possession of that locality by the ancient immigrants. It means "The Nose of Mata". It has however, had myth cast over its meaning. Mataaho was a giant, (the god of earth quakes). In search of warmth, he invoked his gods to send subterranean fires for his comfort. The consequent convulsions of nature resulted in many of the topographical features of the country side, and this hill is said to be Mataaho's nose. Hence all earth seismic phenomena are called "Nga huringa o Mataaho". The turnings of Mataaho.

Another such name is Te Pane-o-Horoiwi "The Head of Horoiwi"; which is the headland east of St. Heliers Bay. Horoiwi was one of the immigrants by the Tainui canoe (1250 a.d.), he went South with his people in the canoe and afterwards returned here with his immediate family. He settled down thereabouts without any opposition or trouble, for no one dare to live on his head, (pane).

Names of this kind were good and sufficient title to occupation of lands — The calling of a place after an ancestral nose or head in fact constituted to the Maori the equivalent of our Land Transfer Act — It was his tribal Certificate of Title — without any encumbrance noted against the same. A good holding title — until a stronger arm might dispossess the ownership.

For who would dare to trespass on the nose or head of ancestors of another tribe — for again apart from the necessity of resisting the attacks of all that ancestors tribal descendants — there was still another fearsome danger — the grave effects of the pervading influence of the law of tapu.

PANE-PANE is a place on the Manukau shores. It means “The heads”; so called from a war ceremonial performed there, when a victorious war party was returning and about to leave the confines of the enemies territory, it there performed a war dance, each warrior holding a head of the slain enemy in his hand. The idea was that the slain foes might there for the last time behold their former homes. Hence that name “Pane-pane”, its full form being “Whaka-tahurihuri panepane”.

Connected with peace making we have various names locally:-

TE TAUPAKI, a place on the Kaipara Railway line, is near where a neutral chief called the contesants of an inter-tribal war to a halt; and he marked near by there a ditch or trench to define the limits of the conquest affected by the victors, and beyond which the vanquished must not be followed. This in later years was recognised as a tribal boundary, and still appears as such on our County maps. It means — “The Binding (Tau) or firmly held peace” (Paki).

Another such name connected with peace-making is KOHIMARAMA which should be Kohi-maramara the final syllable ‘ma’ giving the name quite a different meaning i.e. Kohi — to gather or collect together “maramara” the fragments.

Here in olden times was a tribal peace making was effected, after a devastating war by Ngati-Paoa of Waiheke against these parts by Kapetawa already mentioned. Many local clans had been decimated, and the occasion of their being assembled to formally make peace gave that place its name. In 1860 the Ngati Whatua and Waikato chiefs, being desirous of bringing about a political re-union of the New Zealand tribes summoned a conference of chiefs at Kohimaramara from all parts of New Zealand. The memory of the more ancient event actuated them in selecting Kohimaramara as appropriate for their purpose. Officially this place name like that of Remuera has never been spelt correctly. As now spelt it might mean “The waning moon”.

In dealing with Maori names one needs to know something of the history of the tribal area in which it is found. Unless one possesses that knowledge, it is not always safe to be certain, even if the meaning might appear to be so. For place names, even appearing to be correctly spelt, are often not so: being a mutilated form of the original.

A local name which has caused from time to time much controversy is *Otahuhu* — often stated as *Ota* (Now) *huhu* (grub) of former times a much sought after delicacy by the epecures of ancient Maori times. But its second significance is O (The local home) of Tahuhu (Mt Richmond). He was the ancestor of the tribe Ngai Tahuhu of the neighbourhood.

An example of this is the Southern name place *Oamaru* which "W.B." an authority of Maori matters, says means the O (an expressed wish embodied in an incantation) a — of — Maru a chief of that name. Now I have always understood it means the "place of Amaru", — he was a Southern Island ancestor of a tribe called Ngati-Amaru.

Again in the South Island we have *Kekerengu* (Marlborough) this is called after an unfortunate exile chief, who, to escape the fury of Rauparaha's people fled to that district — only to fall there a victim to the local tribes at the place now so called after him. "Te Kotinga-o-Kekerengu". The dismemberment of "K".

Not being aware of this incident the name place is said by some to mean "black-bags".

Now "Keke-rangu" or *Kekerengu* was so called to commemorate the similar dismemberment of a grand-uncle killed, also thereabouts — He was suspended on stakes drawn onto his arm-pits. Rangu — suspended (aloft) Keke — arm pits. This tragedy took place at *Tapu-te-rango*. The sacred (tapu) place of rango suspension — Island Bay near Wellington.

The idea of his slayers was to impress his people of the futility in so naming him; for he himself now fell to a similar death as that of his elder relative.

Among this class of names are a number quite modern in their origin. These in some cases were given to perpetuate the memory of various native chief famous in the early days of Colonization, among such are:-

*WAHAROA* called after the Ngati Haua chief. This name was bestowed on him in early boyhood. His uncle had been killed on the attack on a Southern fortress, and was slain as he tried to enter the Waharoa (long-opening) the name for the gateway entrance to a fort.

*TAKAANINI* a station beyond Otahuhu so called after Takaanini the old time chieftain who owned the land thereabouts.

There are a number of place names in New Zealand commemorative of places in the South Seas whence the Maoris came to New Zealand.

Among numerous examples of this class of names we have *Rarotonga* (Mt. Smart) *Te Papa-i-Tonga*, the plains or flat of Tonga [Rotorua], *Motu-tapu* (Holy Island) also the name of Mokoia Island at Rotorua. *O-Mangaia* — Long Bay, on the coast north of Takapuna. *Hikurangi* in the Waitakere and at other places and so on. Manukau should be Manuka — a name of this class.

Now let us look at some of the well known names in Auckland.

Point Chevalier was *Rangi-mata-rau* (the day of the hundred spears) — really the name of a tribal battle of ancient times which took place on the foreshore thereabouts.

Out in the Waitemata is a pinnacle rock (Boat Rock) known as *Te Mata* (flint stone) after a tribal talisman buried there. This rock gives its name to the harbour — *Wai-te-*

*mata*, the waters of the Mata Rock. This rock also had another name, *Te Niho-kioré*, the rat's tooth, because, like a rat's tooth, it withstands all wear, despite the flow and rise of the tides about it. This rock was a tribal "tohu", or boundary mark of the tribal fisheries, and was "tapu" at one time. The prisoner victims of a tribal battle were left thereon by their enemies to drown. The "tapu" was rigorously observed until European times, and to fish in this area was a serious matter.

The Watchman Island was *Motu-ngaengae* (Shell Fish Island). Probably it was a favourite collecting place for such food. The name of Shelly Beach (Ponsonby) was *One-maru* (Sheltered Sands). Point Erin (where the Park now is) was *Te Koraenga* (the Headland). St. Mary's Bay was *Oka-a* (the Sharp, Rocky Cliffs), a feature of the foreshore there. Freeman's Bay, now wholly reclaimed, was *Wai-kokota* (cockle waters). A headland at the western side thereof, where the Gas Works now stand, was *Te To* (the Dragging-up Place), i.e. where canoes were kept. Where Queen Street now is was a tidal creek, which met the waters of several rivulets which flowed from the gullies inland; the name was *Wai-horotiu* (waters gliding along).

At the foot of Shortland Street was a rock used as a landing place, called *Te Whatu* (the Rock). Where the Waitemata Hotel now stands was a headland known as *Te Ngutu-wera* (Burnt Lips). Here a careless servant caused an accident of this nature to a young visiting chief, which resulted in quite a lot of trouble to the people concerned. The Fort Street foreshore was a small bay called *Wai-ariki* (the Chief Water); why so cannot now be known. The headland which formerly stood at the termination of Princes Street was "*Te Rerenga-oraiti*", i.e., the Leap of the Survivors. From this cliff a number of escapees of a tribal disaster jumped to save their lives; probably an incident well remembered for future revenge.

Mechanic's Bay (also now wholly reclaimed), where the Maori Hostelry stands at the foot of Parnell Rise, was *Wai-papa*; strictly speaking this was the name of the tidal creek which ran inland where Stanley Street is now formed. The bay itself was known as *Te Toangaroa*, (the long dragging up, no doubt because of the dragging into the waters of canoes here in old times to escape from a coming enemy). History almost repeated itself here in European times (1851), when Sir George Grey ordered a hostile party away, threatening them with the guns of the warship. No time was given for the tide to come in, and the natives were obliged to drag their canoes to low water mark. This incident is still known as *Te Toangaroa*, and doubtless further accentuated the memory of the place name long after the bay itself had disappeared. The headland where the Parnell Baths are was *Te Tau-rarua* (the Song of Annoyance), alluding to an incident of olden times, a song having been sung by a passing war canoe party intended to annoy the people in that village. The hill in the Domain where the museum stands was *Pukekawa* (Sour Hill), because the kumara crops there grown were always very poor; so the soil was blamed — it was reported as sour. It was later renamed *Pukekawa* (Hill of Bitter Memories) by Potatau te Wherowhero in memory of those who had died in wars between Ngapuhi and Waikato. That big gully leading from Newmarket to Hobson Bay was *Te Rua-reoreo* (the Echoes), because the voice of anyone calling out there was duplicated by an echo. The beach at the foot of Brighton Road was *Mata-hare-hare* (the Brandishing of Spears), to commemorate a quarrel there between two chiefs. *Orakei* is a name of doubtful meaning, but I am inclined to think it is the name of a particular place thereabouts so called from one Rakei-iriora of the Tokomaru canoe, some of whose chief people settled here. The native

settlement at Orakei is *Okahu*, called after Kahu-mata-momoe, an Arawa chief who once resided here and in the Kaipara with the ancient Wai-ohua people. *Purewa* (the site of the cemetery) is really the name of a high point at the back of Orakei, whereon stood a look-out tower or sentry post on poles. The correct spelling is *Pourewa*. Lake St. John was *Waiatarua* (Reflecting Waters). Mount Wellington is *Maunga-rei* (the Watchful Mountain). The occupants of the stronghold were alert and ready when an attack was made thereon. At Panmure village, where the township stands, was a large fortified village — *Mau-inaina* (Caught Basking in the Sun). Its occupants were surprised and decimated under the circumstances the name implies. The end of the Tamaki River was *Whangai-makau* (Await the Loved One). Here the Tainui canoe awaited the arrival of one of their chieftainesses, Marama, who left her on the coast of Wharekawa and came overland. *Te Manu-ka* is the correct name of Manukau, though both seem to have been in use even in olden times. Other familiar names are:— *Manuka* (Anxious Thought) — the navigation of the entrance was a good reason for its name; *One-hunga* (pulverised earth), the soil there being notable for its friable nature. An old Maori, however assured me the name was *O-nehunga* (the Burial Grounds) because, said “there were anciently numerous urupas or nehunga of the dead thereabouts”. The Three Kings were *Te Tatua* (the Belt). These hills were said to stand as in a group around a central citadel. A little lakelet, formerly in the hollow at the back of St. Alban’s Church, was *Roto-a-rangi*. Rangi was a young chieftainess who, with a party of attendants, was captured there whilst gathering kakahi shell-fish. She was a chieftainess of One-Tree Hill, and her romantic escape from her captors is a story still told among the people. Mount Roskill was *Te Pa-tapapa*, i.e., the hill fort with the flat top. Mount Albert was *O-wairaka* — strictly, no doubt, the name, not so much of the hill, as of the whole locality. It means — of Wairaka, named after Wairaka of the Mataatua canoe. *Titirangi* (Veronica Shrub) is the name of that district to the west of Mt. Albert. It was the area on which was fought the Maori Waterloo, whereby the ancient Waiohua tribes fell before their Kaipara conquerors.

There is a Maori lament used at funeral assemblies which refers to their nomenclature, viz:

E Maunga-whau e tumai tonu ana  
 Ka whiti tonu nga Wai-o-mata.  
 Koia ena nga putake o nehe ra —  
 Nga tau-tohe o namata — E!  
 E Rau Rangatira o nga iwi!  
 E Tamaki! Whenua parekura!  
 Ka mihi matou kia koe  
 E Tamaki makau rau — E!

Thou, of Maungawhau, standest as of yore,  
 And flashest still thy waves — Wai-o-mata.  
 These indeed were the cause of ancient strife  
 And the endless warfare of the men of old. Alas!  
 Oh, warrior chieftains of the tribes of yore!  
 Oh, Tamaki, land of battlefields!  
 We greet thee still in sad affection —  
 Oh, Tamaki, the contested of a hundred lovers — E!

When the late Maori King Tawhiao officially visited Auckland for the first time to make peace subsequent to the Waikato War, he landed at the Remuera Station, proceeding to Orakei, where he stopped that night. Much had happened in Tamaki since his visits in years gone by. His father, Te Wherowhero, the first king, had died, the Waikato War had been fought, and much tribal land confiscated by the victorious white man. No doubt his feelings were running in a doleful vein, for many of the warrior chieftains who had fallen in the late war were the companions of his early years, when, as a youth, he for some time lived in this district. On that occasion he sung the lament of which the above is part.

I think I have now given an idea of the wealth of historic memory and meaning to the Maori people there is in their place names. There are many names now obsolete — others practically so; but to refer to them all would unduly extend this article. In a future attempt I hope to include some I have omitted, as well as give an account of the names of some of the surrounding districts.

“It is much more interesting to use the native names . . . Without doubt it is a sacred duty to respect the names given by the first discovered of uninhabited places. I think that those of the indigenous people should prevail as soon as they are known. A time will come when these names will be the only vestiges of the language spoken by the primitive inhabitants.” (From Captain Dumont d’Urville’s visit to Whangarei, Waitemata and the Thames, 1827.)